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| Name of Property: | Lower Pecos Canyonlands Archeological District |
| City, State: | Del Rio (vicinity), Texas |
| Period of Significance: | 4200 - 1000 years ago (2250 BCE – 950 CE) |
| NHL Criteria: | 5, 6 |
| NHL Themes: | I. Peopling Places II. Expressing Cultural Values |
| Previous Recognition: | Sixteen of the 35 contributing properties were listed on the National Register in the 1970s at the national level of significance |
| National Historic Context: | I. Cultural Developments: Indigenous American Populations A. The Earliest Inhabitants 11. Archaic Adaptations of the Plains B. Prehistoric (Pre-contact) Archeology: Topical Facets 10. Prehistoric (Pre-contact) Religion, Ideology, and Ceremonialism |

NHL Significance:

- The thirty-five contributing sites in the Lower Pecos Canyonlands Archeological District contain a superlative, unbroken record of human occupation spanning at least 11,000 years and individually and collectively have the potential to yield nationally significant information about an exceptional Archaic society, including how and if boundaries were established, how land tenure was negotiated, how resources were shared (or not) within the Lower Pecos River region and with neighboring regions, and how art was utilized to communicate and confirm belief-systems.
- The concentration of archeological sites in this region with preserved perishable materials is among the most extensive in the American Southwest. Twenty-six contributing sites with extant deposits or collections from well-excavated investigations are in the district. Their intact, stratified archeological deposits from the period of significance contain remarkably well preserved perishable artifacts that do not commonly persist in archeological deposits and can yield far more complete and complex information about the past than sites without this level of preservation.
- Pecos River style rock imagery, unique to this region, is in 27 of the contributing sites. It is the most abundant, well-preserved, and complex pictograph style in the Southern Plains and is among the most significant bodies of images in North America.
- A new method to extract carbon suitable for radiocarbon dating was pioneered at sites in the district and is today used worldwide. Through that method, Pecos River style art is now known to be one of the oldest dated pictograph styles in North America, dating between 4200 and 1465 radiocarbon-dated years ago. Pecos River style art is also the best-dated rock art on the continent with 33 dates from 19 figures at 10 sites.
- Analysis of Pecos River style art panels has shown that, unlike other Archaic period rock art in North America, they were created as planned compositions. Pecos River style imagery was governed by rules and each element and figure contributes to the text displayed on the rock. These panels are composed narratives, representing the earliest “books” in North America.
- Formal art analysis of the contributing White Shaman site resulted in the interpretation that it represents the creation story of the Archaic people who painted it. Panels in other sites in the district may contain other aspects of the cosmology (world view) of these hunter-gatherers. Study of this art holds tremendous promise to better understand Archaic spiritual beliefs, pre-contact cultural values, and how Archaic societies translated those values into their daily lives.
- Mythologies of Uto-Aztecan speaking peoples in Mesoamerica have been connected to the artistic motifs in the White Shaman site. Extensive study is still needed to examine how this ideological universe was later transmitted to cultures well south of the Lower Pecos River region.

- The “dirt” archeology with its exceptional preservation, when combined with the Pecos River style art as a single field of study, will greatly enhance our understanding of pre-contact social and ritual organization. Together the art and the deposits offer a superb opportunity to examine patterns of ritual and daily practices, such as the social, economic, and ecological factors involved in choosing places on the landscape for imagery, habitation, or both, how children and the elderly were cared for, mobility patterns, and other aspects of lifeways that sites without this level of preservation and datable, interpretable art cannot approach.

Integrity:

- The deposits in the sites dating to the period of significance retain very high levels of integrity of feeling, materials, design, and archeology based on their cultural stratigraphy. The contributing sites in the Lower Pecos Canyonlands Archeological District have been subject to impacts from sheep and cattle ranching and some looting. Three contributing rockshelters at lower elevation in the canyons are prone to impacts from intermittent floods. However, these types of impacts affect all pre-contact archeological resources to some degree.
- The art still retains a strong integrity of workmanship, materials, design, and feeling based on their ability to continue to convey the same cohesive design and feeling that dominated the art throughout the region for 4000 years. The similarity in workmanship and materials can be recognized at sites across this cultural landscape despite the exfoliation, fading, and increased wasp nest construction in some sites.
- The dramatic view-shed of the region retains its integrity of location and setting and conveys the pre-contact attributes of that experienced by the people 4000 years ago. The location and setting of the sites in the district have not been subjected to much modern development. Population remains low, and infrastructure impacts are largely limited to highway and pipeline rights-of-way.

Owner of Properties: Amistad National Recreation Area (a unit of the National Park Service); State of Texas (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Tech University); Private Owners (Jack & Wilmuth Skiles, Witte Museum, Katie and Pete Clark, Milton Howe and Rowena Dasch, Mary and Rick Rylander, Jeanne and Mike McGee, Carol Hayman, Bob White and Robert Corbin, and the Texas Nature Conservancy).

Acreage of Property: 1,518.51 acres

Origins of Nomination: The potential for a National Historic Landmark district in the Lower Pecos River region of Texas was identified at a meeting of representatives of state, federal, and private organizations. These entities included Texas Parks and Wildlife Department officials, Amistad National Recreation Area representatives, Texas State University (Department of Anthropology professors), Rock Art Foundation board members (now part of the Witte



Museum in San Antonio), and Shumla Archaeological Research & Education Center representatives. This nomination was undertaken as part of a larger effort by these organizations and private landowners to recognize and document the outstanding significance of these sites and to encourage future preservation and research of both the cultural deposits and the remarkable imagery.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

- Designation of the district would increase public awareness of and interest in the archeology of the Lower Pecos River region.
- Amistad Reservoir and the federal and state lands surrounding it, such as Seminole Canyon State Park and Historic Site and the Devils River State Natural Area, are favored destinations for the public. Designation of the district would serve to increase travel for guided tours and increase economic benefits to the local economy.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: None are known.

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of September 9, 2020):

- Christopher Ryan, Superintendent, Amistad National Recreation Area – 6/27/2017
- Representative Will Hurd – 7/7/2020
- Beau Hester, Park Superintendent, Devils River State Natural Area, Del Norte Unit – 7/4/2017
- Randy Rosales, Park Superintendent, Seminole Canyon State Park & Historic Site – 7/18/2017
- Martina Callahan, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, Comanche Nation – 6/15/2017
- Carolyn E. Boyd, Ph.D., Research Director, Shumla Archaeological Research & Education Center – 6/27/2017
- Jessica L. Lee, Executive Director, Shumla Archaeological Research & Education Center – 6/27/2017
- Karen Steelman, Ph.D., Assistant Research Director, Shumla Archaeological Research & Education Center – 7/19/2017

National Historic Landmarks Committee Comments:

- Explain why some resources are contributing and some are non-contributing, especially those sites that have been extensively excavated.

National Historic Landmarks Committee Recommendation:

The Committee recommends that the National Park System Advisory Board recommend to the Secretary of the Interior the designation of the Lower Pecos Canyonlands Archeological District in Val Verde County, Texas, as a National Historic Landmark, with any additions and corrections as noted by the Committee being made prior to the nomination being forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior for action.

Advisory Board Recommendation: